

Cadets Soar at Flight Academy

It isn't every day you see fourteen and fifteen-year-olds flying aircraft. That is, unless, you happen to find yourself at one of Civil Air Patrol's glider academies. Such was the case for me, as I had the privilege of being on the staff for the 2013 Northeast Region Glider Flight Academy at Farmer's Pride Airport in Fredericksburg, PA. My official assignment for the June 2013 event was Public Affairs Officer. Armed with every camera

and lens I owned, I made the six-hour drive from Saratoga Springs, NY, eager to capture what was sure to be a terrific week of flying, learning, and camaraderie for the sixteen cadets carefully chosen to attend. A last-minute request to serve as one of the TAC officers afforded me the chance to get out from behind the camera and actually pitch in. I hadn't foreseen how truly rewarding the experience was to be.

Farmer's Pride, built in 1941, is a grass airfield set in the beautiful Pennsylvania farm country. Upon arrival, cadets checked in and picked their bunks at the barracks in the Fort Indian-



By Kevin Irish



town Gap Military Complex, ten miles west. Next, they were transported to the airfield where they were given a briefing on how the academy would be run, followed by some hands-on demonstrations of wing running, signaling, proper aircraft handling, and safety.

In the following days, the tow pilots were towing gliders nonstop for various training exercises; from thermalling, to simulated rope breaks, to mastering the traffic pattern, and landing. The photo and video opportunities were limitless. After a day and a half of capturing footage, I offered my services helping return gliders to the flight line from the runway. Having never done this before, there was something of a learning curve, but in little time, cadets and their instructors were being returned to the air in rapid succession.

Coupled to the extensive in-air flight training was comprehensive ground instruction in a classroom setting. Here, cadets received education on topics including FAA rules and regulations, soaring techniques, aircraft limitations, aeronautical chart reading, weather, and many others.



Above: Cadet Ceara Berry, Pennsylvania Wing CAP, prepares to close her canopy for takeoff as Cadet Trevor Major, Delaware Wing CAP, looks on. Below: Cadet Matthew Irish, New York Wing CAP, identifies his landing initial point for Glider Instructor Pilot Capt Paul Finestone, CAP.



At the end of each day, despite some expected fatigue, the cadets displayed an impressive second wind back at the barracks. There was little work required keeping order, as the cadets were busy doing homework assignments and just basically decompressing. Hearing them compare their experiences and learning from the day was proof they

were dialed-in to what they came to do. Some impressive statistics from this academy include: one beautiful grass strip airport, nine days, sixteen well-prepared cadets, seventeen hard-working senior members, 272 tasty meals, 554 gallons of aviation fuel, ten gallons of diesel fuel, seven solo pilots, nine pre-solo pilots, two operating tow planes, four airworthy gliders, two donated retrieval vehicles, 510 total successful flights (including all tow plane takeoffs and landings), and one umbrella cockatoo.

The flight instructors at this event have my admiration and deep respect after witnessing the knowledge and technique transferred to these sixteen Civil Air Patrol cadets in nine short days. This year there were nine first-year cadets, all of whom completed supervised solos. This is where the cadet is in full command of the aircraft from takeoff to landing with no intervention from the instructor, verbal or otherwise, unless necessary for safety. The remaining seven were second-year returning cadets; all of whom soloed.



Cadet John Bartolic, CAP and Glider Instructor Pilot LtCol Chuck Bechtel, CAP touchdown at Farmers Pride in the CAP L-23 Super Blanik.

Being the father of one of these soloing cadets added a dimension to the work of staffing the event which challenges my ability to describe. I can only imagine the sense of accomplishment felt after flying in formation while being towed to several thousand feet and landing all on your own for the very first time.

The flight academies offered by Civil

Air Patrol provide a unique and exciting opportunity for young people to do something many of their peers would never dream possible. The cadets themselves are amazed to realize their capabilities exceed far more than once thought. The look on the face of a cadet who has just opened the canopy after solo is the priceless evidence. ✈



In fine fashion and tradition, solo cadets are doused with water in celebration. From left to right; back row: 2nd Lt Kevin Cornell, CAP; Cadet Joshua Freeze, Pennsylvania Wing CAP; Cadet Robert Hawranko, Pennsylvania Wing CAP; and Cadet Curtis Scheboth, Pennsylvania Wing CAP. Front row: Cadet Dane Fisher, Pennsylvania Wing CAP; Cadet John Bartolic, Pennsylvania Wing CAP; Cadet Matthew Irish, New York Wing CAP; and Cadet James Hildebrand, Virginia Wing CAP.

